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T R E E S I N T H E G R E A T P L A I N S

A radio interview between Fred Schoder, Forest Service, and Morse Salisbury, Office of Information, broadcast Friday, October 1, 1937 in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by NBC and a network of 70 associated radio stations.

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★ OCT 29 1937 ★

U. S. Department of Agriculture

SALISBURY:

Fred Schoder, Administrative Officer of the State and Private Forestry Division of the U. S. Forest Service is with us today. I want him to tell us something about the Prairie States Forestry project and the planting of windbreaks and shelter-strips in the Great Plains. Two weeks ago, E. W. Tinker of the Forest Service told us about some of the results of tree planting and when it was started three years ago Mr. F. A. Silcox, Chief of the Forest Service, talked about the plans for the shelter-strips. I think Fred can give a few highlights and tell us what the farmers themselves are saying about the trees. Fred, I don't suppose the windbreaks and shelter-strips are one hundred percent successful.

SCHODER:

No, they aren't, but we did not expect them to be. You see, this is about the first time tree planting has been tried out on a big scale in a place where trees didn't grow naturally to any extent. Trees have usually been planted where there was plenty of moisture so that they would grow timber, but the shelter-strips are planted for shelter and protection.

SALISBURY:

Are the trees doing the job?

SCHODER:

Yes, they are. Morse, no one can stand under those rows of green trees out there on the prairies without being impressed.

SALISBURY:

I don't doubt that. I've heard some rather tall stories coming out of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Oklahoma, and Texas. For instance, one about trees that were 20 feet high less than 3 years after planting.

SCHODER:

That isn't a tall story. That's a fact. Some of the new trees are twenty feet high, others even higher. We've heard from a farmer whose shelter-strip was planted in 1935. Last summer he placed a 2 x 4 between two of the trees and fixed up a swing for his young son.

SALISBURY:

Seriously, do you mean to tell me that those trees are big enough, and strong enough, to support a swing for the youngster.

SCHODER:

Absolutely. And the youngster is 7 years old at that. His dad sent in a picture of him, which showed the young chap hanging by his feet from the swing. But that's not all. That youngster has found birds nesting in the new shelter-strip trees.

(over)

SALISBURY:

That's something, isn't it? Birds nesting in trees that have been planted only two or three years?

SCHODER:

Yes, sir, they are. You know, out in the plains the tree-nesting birds have been scarce. Now they're coming in and these shelter-strips are a sort of Federal housing project as far as the birds are concerned.

SALISBURY:

Farmers would like that, all right. The more birds, the fewer insects.

SCHODER:

Also the trees give shelter to quail and pheasants and other game birds.

SALISBURY:

What do the farmers think about the trees as a business proposition?

SCHODER:

One of them wrote in to the Forest Service, "I've got about seven thousand trees on my farm this spring and I think they're worth more to the place than any other crop ever planted here".

SALISBURY:

That's a good recommendation.

SCHODER:

Then, we have a picture of a western Nebraska rye field. Along half of the windward edge of the field is a strip of several rows of trees. Along the other half there are no trees. The picture tells the story of shelter-strips. Where the trees protect the field from the wind, the farmer is standing knee-deep in rye. Where the trees don't shelter the field, there's nothing but brown dirt. Oh, a few scattered stalks of rye. Naturally, that farmer is going to plant trees along the rest of the field.

SALISBURY:

If his case is typical I can understand why Plains farmers appreciate their trees.

SCHODER:

It's typical all right. This summer Mr. Tinker went out to a Nebraska farm. The temperature was 103 degrees fairly hot even for Nebraska. Tinker figured he'd find his man in the coolest spot at the farmhouse. But he didn't. That farmer was out in the field with a hoe, going up and down his rows of trees. He was cultivating to give the trees the benefit of every possible bit of moisture. They meant more to him than his personal comfort.

SALISBURY:

I'll say he treasured those trees.

SCHODER:

He certainly did. Then, there's Harry Harper, of Page, Nebraska. Last summer he was pretty busy with his own harvesting and other work and didn't have

much time to cultivate his tree-strip. On August 4th, he hired a crew of eight men to hoe the weeds out of his tree-strip. He paid them \$22.40 out of his own pocket. Those trees mean a lot to Mr. Harper. Another farmer paid \$58.08 to a crew of men to cultivate his strip. Many other cases like that have been reported.

SALISBURY:

They do value those plantings, don't they? Now just a few words, Fred, about your methods. Do you plant the same kind of trees all through the Plains?

SCHODER:

No, that wouldn't work at all. Success depends on using the right species of tree. It must be native to the vicinity or perfectly adapted to it. Of course the Forest Service has carefully selected the species to use in each location. That's one of the reasons why nine out of every ten of the 21,000,000 trees planted last fall and this spring are well established and growing in fine condition. That's an exceptional figure for tree survival under Plains conditions.

SALISBURY:

I should say it is.

SCHODER:

But tree planting in the prairie plains has to be done properly to get results. Young trees need about the same care as corn during the first few years of growth.

SALISBURY:

That sounds reasonable. Now how many trees do you need to protect a farm?

SCHODER:

Depends on the size of the farm. Right now it looks as though about $8\frac{1}{2}$ acres of shelter-strips or windbreaks will protect a 160-acre farm. That's an average figure. On some farms it will be less and on other farms more.

SALISBURY:

Is this tree planting idea spreading among the Plains farmers?

SCHODER:

Very rapidly. They see that the right trees, given the proper care, will grow. They see that it's a good business proposition. Many of the men hired with drought-relief funds to plant trees are now buying stock and putting in their own shelterbelts.

SALISBURY:

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Some of this planting is in what is called the "dust-bowl" region, isn't it, Fred?

SCHODER:

Yes, they have plenty of wind out there, and it peels the top soil off and carries it into the next county or State. I was stationed out in the Nebraska sandhills for a year and a half and when one of those dust-storms blew up, it wasn't funny. I still remember buying a new windshield for my gas-buggy because the windblown sand had frosted the old one till it looked like a bathroom window.

SALISBURY:

Will a protective belt of trees stop that?

SCHODER:

It will tame down the wind a whole lot. We figure that a 30-mile wind striking a tree shelterbelt 35 feet high is slowed down so that at a distance of 200 feet on the lee side of the trees the wind's speed is only 15 miles per hour.

SALISBURY:

That should cut down its ability to carry dirt and sand. But, Fred, what do you consider your prize exhibit on the project?

SCHODER:

That's a hard one. I think the whole 2,600 miles of shelterstrips planted since 1935 is a prize exhibit. But if you want me to be specific: There are some cottonwoods that have grown 22 feet in two years. Then there are the ambitious tamarix seedlings we planted near Chillicothe, Texas, in 1936. They were on especially good soil where they grew rapidly. Believe it or not, the tamarix produced seed the same year they were planted. The seed fell into moist soil and started to grow, and we had 100,000 new tamarix seedlings. Imagine, trees planted in the spring producing their own seed and raising a crop of youngsters the following spring.

SALISBURY:

Well that certainly tells us some things about your tree planting work in the prairie-plains States.

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